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U.S. report likely to fault Moscow on SALT

From Wire Services

Washington — An interagency task force is likely to report soon to President Reagan that the Soviet Union has violated the terms of the unratified SALT II treaty limiting nuclear arms, administration sources said last night.

The panel also intends to raise "serious questions" about Soviet compliance with the 1974 treaty limiting underground nuclear tests, the sources said.

Should the president and his National Security Council endorse the findings, officials said the interagency group had prepared several American responses, ranging from private diplomatic protests to the Soviet Union, having the president present the charges and evidence publicly or even declaring that the Reagan administration no longer feels bound to observe the treaty.

Some officials said Mr. Reagan may make a speech or issue a statement on purported Soviet treaty violations, making a missile test on February 8 the centerpiece. But the response would deal as well with U.S. suspicions that Moscow has also violated treaties imposing limits on underground nuclear testing and possibly even the antiballistic missile treaty of 1972.

Twice in the past week, Mr. Reagan has hinted at some new action on the topic of possible Soviet treaty violations.

On Tuesday, he told a news conference "we have reason to believe there have been numerous violations" of the underground testing treaty. He noted that new

U.S. proposals to strengthen treaty provisions against cheating had been rejected by the Soviets.

In his Los Angeles speech Thursday, Mr. Reagan said "there have been increasingly serious grounds for questioning their compliance with the arms control agreements that have already been signed and that we have both pledged to uphold. I may have more to say on this in the future."

The president's ultimate action, officials said, would depend on the outcome of two months of technical analysis of intelligence data on the February 8 Soviet missile test and policy deliberations at the National Security Council.

Officials said there was already a virtual consensus among officials at the Defense Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, the State Department and the White House that violations had occurred. Other officials said a final report and policy recommendations were due to go to the National Security Council soon.

In the past, the United States has questioned Moscow through diplomatic channels about some of its missile tests and deployments but has never formally accused the Soviet Union of violating a strategic arms treaty. But the Reagan administration has accused the Soviet Union at the United Nations of violating international bans against the use of chemical warfare in Afghanistan, Laos and Cambodia.

An official declaration that the United States no longer felt bound by the strategic arms treaty signed by President Carter and Leonid I. Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, but never approved by the U.S. Senate, would have an impact on current arms talks in Geneva and the arms race in general, officials said.

Regarding the February 8 missile test and other instances in which Washington has suspected the Soviet Union of violations of several arms agreements, the United States has gone through diplomatic channels to ask questions of Moscow about its compliance with the accords. Officials said the Soviet Union had always answered that it was complying with all the arms treaties.

The 1979 treaty, which the Reagan administration has said it will uphold as long as Moscow does, permits each side to test and deploy one new intercontinental ballistic missile. In November, U.S. officials say, Moscow tested a new missile and told the United States this was the one permitted by the treaty. But U.S. officials contend that on February 8 another new kind of missile was tested.

Initially, some officials suggested this might be a permissible modification of an earlier missile rather than a second new missile. The president ordered a "very intensive technical assessment" of intelligence information on the test.

Officials said this effort had been hindered by the heavy coding of Soviet telemetry or electronic data from the missile tests, data monitored by U.S. intelligence and checked to verify Soviet compliance with the arms treaty. The treaty forbids coding that "impedes" such verification.

Meanwhile, a former defense science official said yesterday the United States "scaled back the ruler" in the 1970s to make seismic data show that Soviet underground tests were within the threshold.

Harold M. Agnew, a former member of the Defense Science Board and an adviser to the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency from 1974 to 1981, said U.S. scientists had data from a Soviet nuclear test on July 4, "1976 or 1978," that indicated a test underground with an explosive yield of 400,000 tons of TNT — far above the treaty limit of 150,000 tons.

In a telephone interview from his home near San Diego, where he is an executive with GA Technologies, Inc., Mr. Agnew said "our scientists argued that maybe the rock was different." In a letter to *Science* magazine, Mr. Agnew wrote that "we have re-normalized our criteria for detection in order to reconcile the seismic signals received to keep the Soviet tests within the 150-kiloton limit."

That, he said yesterday, was "shrinking the ruler" to make the data fit.

Though U.S. scientists say the uncertainty in the signals is such that a test at the 150,000-ton limit might register as 300,000 tons, Mr. Agnew said there had been further Soviet tests registering beyond 300,000 tons.

The president told reporters in a group interview March 29 that his administration had proposed negotiating stronger verification procedures for the Threshold Test Ban Treaty of 1974 and the Peaceful Nuclear Exchange Treaty of 1976, but Moscow had rejected this approach.